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School Practitioner Community of Practice
(A network for sharing & exchange)
February 19, 2020

Topics for discussion –

>**Strengthening School-Home Connections:**
        Challenges and strategies for the next few months

>**Self-report may exaggerate severity of mental health problems**

Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

Note: Go to http://smhp.psych.ucla for links to other Center resources including
 >Upcoming initiatives, conferences & workshops
 >Calls for grant proposals, presentations, and papers
 >Training and job opportunities
 >Upcoming webcasts & other professional development opportunities

This resource is from the
        Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA

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Given education budgets, we have been asked to increase our outreach to make our free resources more available (e.g., for planning, professional development, etc.).

So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).

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For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm

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Topic for Discussion –

>**Strengthening School-Home Connections:**
    Challenges and strategies for the next few months

Over the first half of the year, teachers and school staff have interacted with many families. Hopefully, most of these contacts have been positive (e.g., focused on what their youngsters are doing well). Inevitably, some have not gone well. And, in too many instances, school-home contacts are quite limited and impersonal.

We recognize that for elementary schools the challenge to connect with all the students' families seems almost doable, while the challenge is much greater for middle and high school teachers.

As a stimulus for discussing ways to improve school-home connections, here's an excerpt from an article entitled: *Five Reasons Why Parents Are Not Participating*
    http://www.storiesfromschoolaz.org/five-reasons-parents-participating-uninvolved-parents-care/

>**They do not have the luxury of time.** An hour meeting at five o'clock may not seem like much of a commitment, but let's not assume all parents work banking hours. For servers and customer service representatives, five o'clock is the peak hour of business traffic. In other words, in some industries, this is actually the most difficult and expensive block to request off. When you alter your perspective, the parent dilemma changes....

>They are afraid. Have you considered how scary school events might feel for some parents?...Think about the parents of first generation students: for some, they didn't finish high school because conferencing with the teacher was a skill they never learned! This in context with anxiety could make a school event feel a lot more complicated than just being physically present.

>They Don't Know How to be Involved. Some parents might not understand what you want them to do. They might ask themselves questions such as: "Do I just stand here, or am I supposed to have a role?"; "Do I have to work with other parents?"; "If I come once does that mean I will be expected to come all of the time?"; "Will I embarrass my child if I don't understand what is being taught?" Consider these questions and think about how you might subtly, and pro-actively answer them for parents. After all, if you're expecting people, you may as well share the details of your expectations with them.

>They Don't Understand Why Involvement is Important. Some parents wonder: if the teacher is a master of their subject area, why do they need me? Furthermore, some teenagers do not want their parent to attend events. Put these together and a parent might wonder what exactly is the value of simple physical presence. And yet, as teachers we know it matters. So, have you communicated that impact with stakeholders?

>They Don't Understand You. Teachers know that some parents do not speak English, but we might consider that even in English we speak with unfamiliar educational jargon.. These reasons open up a range of considerations regarding parent input...

Below are some ideas from colleagues and a few resources that might be helpful:

(1) A colleague sent an article written for the ACSA Leadership magazine. Here is an excerpt:

... As a former elementary school teacher, I noticed my parents were more actively engaged in the classroom when I made them feel welcome, invited their input and encouraged their participation.... Connecting requires communicating, but communicating doesn't necessarily result in connecting. While communicating is a transferring of information, connecting is a joining together, establishing a relationship....

In my school district, parents are provided the opportunity to participate in a yearly parent survey that highlights and rates targeted areas to ensure a positive home/school connection, including statements related to school climate, safety and a sense of belonging. Survey choices include such responses as "I feel respected and welcomed at my child's school" and "When I have a concern I know whom to contact."

In addition, classified staff, including home/school liaisons and community relations personnel, are provided professional development to support parent engagement at the site. They are prepared and encouraged to provide information as it relates to building positive connections with families and the community, including customer service standards. In addition, the trainings are utilized to support staff with tools empowering them to engage parents in the process.

In my current administrative role in our parent involvement department, our mission is to "empower, engage and connect families to support student achievement." That connection includes a curriculum that focuses on providing knowledge, direction and resources to increase parent engagement.

Collaboration with school site administration, other departments throughout the district and community-based organizations reinforces one of our core beliefs and commitments: Collaborative adult relationships are essential, and parents, students and the community as a whole are vital partners....

Maintaining positive connections with parents also requires an initial investment of personal time. It is not enough to contact or communicate with parents a few times during the year, at back-to-school night, parent-teacher conferences, carnivals, class parties, open house, etc. While those activities are important, individual personal contact throughout the year builds positive relationships that may last a lifetime....

Of course, there's always the possibility that for various reasons parents may not always be receptive to communicating with the school, much less making connections. However, while it

may be a more difficult task, as caring educators who want the best for kids, this should not be a reason to throw in the towel.

First, there should be an investigation, without judgment, of the reason. Many families deal with life circumstances that we could not imagine. For example, my district has one of the highest rates of childhood poverty in the nation. That in and of itself carries a multitude of possible reasons for poor communication in parent engagement. Nevertheless, a willingness to understandand provide possible alternatives to connect goes a long way and demonstrates to families a commitment to our core beliefs that they are vital partners.

Our ultimate goal is to create an open, trustworthy atmosphere where parents and families have the opportunity, tools and resources to participate in the journey of their child's education....

(2) Excerpt from *Pulling in Parents: Changes that Work*
    https://www.schoolcounselor.org/newsletters/April-2018/pulling-in-parents-changes-that-work?st=NJ

Increasing parental involvement begins with a belief system. We have to believe that parents want to be actively involved in their children's education and then act accordingly. We have tremendous parent support for our comprehensive school counseling program at my middle school.

We are in our fifth year of program improvement. Ninety percent of our students live in poverty and qualify for free lunch; 85 percent are English-language learners. Thirty-three percent of our students report having one or more incarcerated parent, and that number jumps to 75 percent when including immediate family members who are incarcerated. We are the middle school for homeless sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students. You get the picture.

It would be so easy to look at our families and pity them, to throw up our hands at the plethora of roadblocks to parental involvement. However, we believe in our families, so we succeed in having tremendous parental involvement.

We... started with a needs assessment: What do our families need? How do they feel about coming to school? Is the open door really open? We used surveys, phone calls, chatting in the community, student study team meetings and parent forums to gather information. Then we looked at roadblocks and strategies to overcome them and meet the needs. We included a parent survey in our registration packet....

Beyond any survey, you know your school, your students, your parents and your community. Look hard at what you know and gather information from a random sample of your stakeholders (students, parents, staff, community members, district office personnel, law enforcement, mental health agencies, etc.)....

In the past, parents had to make an appointment during school hours to see the school counselor.

Now: Parents may come in any time from one hour before school through three hours after school ends. We also schedule monthly nights to accommodate working parents, and we invite the entire family to participate in each event or meeting. For walk-ins, we have an assigned counselor of the day and administration supports flexible scheduling for the school counselors who come in early or stay late for these meetings....

Parenting classes: District-level parent classes had low attendance due to lack of transportation and translation, and promotion only via the Internet.

Now: We now offer parenting classes taught by our teachers and school counselors at the individual schools. The whole family can attend together with child care provided that we fund using district, SIP, Title I and ELD funds...."

(3) Excerpt from a (2020) research study in the Journal of Child and Family Studies entitled: *What is Parent Engagement in Early Learning? Depends Who You Ask.*.
    https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-019-01680-6

...it is unclear whether educators and parents hold similar views about what they believe are relevant parent engagement activities and their respective responsibilities for supporting children's learning. For example, parents may view parent engagement as a set of behaviors or values communicated to children in the home such as providing homework support, reading with their children, or instilling values about the importance of a good education. In contrast, educators may emphasize parent behaviors observable to them demonstrating parental commitment to

supporting children's education such as parents volunteering in the classroom, chaperoning on field trips, participating on school committees, responding to school communications, and assuming leadership roles within the school. These are very different conceptualizations of parent engagement. Given the importance of parent engagement for education policy and practice, there is surprisingly little research comparing how different stakeholders define and operationalize parent engagement.

     Lack of consensus on how to define this important construct can contribute to low expectations of parents, demoralization among educators, inefficient use of school resources designed to foster and improve parent engagement, and biases toward single working parents who are unable to be more present in the school. For example, using parent attendance at school functions as an indicator of parent engagement may lead to erroneous conclusions about parents' investment in their children's learning if only a handful of parents participate in these opportunities. Not surprisingly, parent engagement has also been described as "a value loaded term", in part because many common indicators of parent engagement may not be feasible for parents with limited resources or compatible with parents' beliefs about their role in supporting their children's learning...

     Overall, we found little agreement among stakeholders in how they defined or operationalized parent engagement in early learning...."

For more on reaching out to families to enhance student/learning supports, see

>*Self-study survey: Home involvement*
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/homeinvolvementsurvey.pdf

Focus is on school-wide and classroom-based efforts designed to
(a) address the specific learning and support needs of adults in the home (e.g., support services to assist in addressing basic survival needs and obligations to the children; adult education classes to enhance literacy, job skills, English-as-a-second language, citizenship preparation; enrichment and recreational opportunities; mutual support groups)
(b) help those in the home improve how basic student obligations are met (e.g., enhancing caretaker literacy skills; providing guidance related to parenting and how to help with schoolwork; teaching family members how to support and enrich student learning)
(c) improve forms of basic communication that promote the wellbeing of student, family, and school (e.g., facilitating home/school connections and sense of community through familynetworking and mutual support; facilitating child care and transportation to reduce barriers to coming to school; language translation; phone calls and/or e-mail from teacher and other staff with good news; frequent and balanced conferences – student-led when feasible; outreach to attract and facilitate participation of hard-to-reach families – including student dropouts)
(d) enhancing home support for student learning and development and for problem solving and decision making essential to a student's well-being (e.g., preparing and engaging families for participation in supporting growth and planning and problem-solving)
(e) recruit those at home to support, collaborate, and partner in strengthening school and community by meeting classroom, school, and community needs (e.g., volunteering to welcome and support new families; participating in school governance.

Also see the Center's Quick Find:

>*Parent/Home Involvement and Engagement in Schools*
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/homework.htm

  Here are a few of the links to Center resources that are listed on the Quick FInd:

>>*Home Involvement, Engagement, and Re-engagement in Schooling*
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/ch6home.pdf
>>*Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement*
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/44%20guide%207%20fostering%20school%20family%20and%20community%20involvement.pdf
>>*Parent and Home Involvement in Schools*
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/parenthome/parent1.pdf

>>*Enhancing Home Involvement to Address Barriers to Learning*
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homeinv.pdf
>>*Engaging and Re-engaging Families When a Student is Not Doing Well*
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/familyengage.pdf

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Please let us hear from you

What do you suggest about improving how schools engage families?

Share your perspective about these concerns!
And send them and any other comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Topic for Discussion –

>Self-report may exaggerate the severity of mental health problems

Here are excerpts from a journal and from a report for further discussion related to the Feb. 5 concern about overdiagnosis:

(1) *Self-report screening questionnaires overestimate prevalence of depression*

> https://www.healio.com/psychiatry/depression/news/online/%7B45da439e-41e7-4fa4-9b44-4c492a753a96%7D/self-report-screening-questionnaires-overestimate-prevalence-of-depression

Using patient self-report screening questionnaires to estimate prevalence of depression in a population rather than diagnostic methods conducted by clinicians has led to substantial overestimations, making it difficult to offer patients the best resources...

Research methods that so dramatically exaggerate the prevalence of depression can lead to people getting treatment for a disorder they don't have and to consuming resources that make it less likely that people with depression get the treatment they need....

Although prevalence of major depressive disorder is estimated using validated diagnostic interviews in large population samples, researchers increasingly use self-report screening questionnaires because they are less expensive and require fewer resources, according to the researchers, and this method can misrepresent the prevalence of depression....

Positive predictive value in screening questionnaires for depression is often very low because screening tests cast a wide net....

(2) Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH) 2019 Annual Report
    https://ccmh.psu.edu/files/2020/01/2019-CCMH-Annual-Report.pdf

The Center for Collegiate Mental Health has found that reliance on student self-report may be contributing to exaggerated prevalence rates. As just one example, CCMH found that, 40% of students seeking services nationally report having "thoughts of ending my life" (in the last two weeks). Clinicians, on the other hand, indicate that suicidality is a concern for only 10.3% of the same students. In other words, students report the presence of suicidal thoughts at almost four times the rate at which clinicians judge that the thoughts rise to the level of a presenting concern warranting treatment. This differential suggests caution in solely using self-report surveys to determine prevalence or need....This brief overview of the "need" for mental-health services in higher education suggests that 20-35% of the college student population might be in "need" each year, although this estimate might be somewhat inflated due to the aforementioned problems of reliance on self-report data. ...

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Please let us hear from you

Send all comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu
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Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

Creating constructive school family connections
https://extension.umn.edu/parent-school-partnerships/creating-constructive-school-family-connections

Family, School, Community Connections
https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1981/Family-School-Community-Connections.html

Cultural Family Connections https://www.lacrosseschools.org/programs-services/cultural-family-connections/

School/Safety.gov https://www.schoolsafety.gov/

District Wide SEL Essentials for Superintendents:a Toolkit to Support District Leadership in Systemic Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning
https://drc.casel.org/uploads/sites/3/2020/02/Districtwide-SEL-for-Superintendents-web-version.pdf

Basic psychological need theory: Advancements, critical themes, and future directions by Maarten Vansteenkiste, Richard M. Ryan, & Bart Soenens
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338718454_Basic_psychological_need_theory_Advancements_critical_themes_and_future_directions

The Strengths of People in Poverty
https://psychologicalscience.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=9082cc31df19dd4e8c5bfb8e3&id=c8d93b940c&e=c210f8201a

What Students Are Saying About How Much They Use Their Phones, and Whether We Should Be Worried
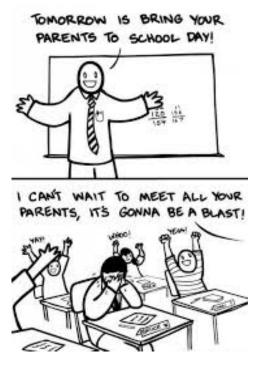https://psychlearningcurve.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5c6e48ff042fca9fe3cb857b9&id=d40689f820&e=b2d96422c2

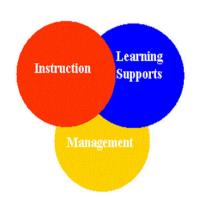*Youth Compendium of Physical Activities for Classroom Teachers*
https://www.nccor.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NCCOR-Youth-Compendium-of-Physical-Activities-for-Classroom-Teachers.pdf

A teacher sent the following letter to parents:

If you can promise that you won't believe all that your child says goes on at school, I will promise that I won't believe all that your child says goes on at home.

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For information about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
go to http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

Also online are two related free books

Improving School Improvement
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

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**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**

For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.

**We post a broad range of issues and responses to the Net Exchange
on our website at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm
and on Facebook (access from the Center's home page http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/)**